

SOUTHWEST FISHERIES SCIENCE CENTER
SECOND QUARTER REPORT-FY 2003
For the period January 1, 2003 through March 31, 2003

Submitted By: John Hunter, Director, Fisheries Resources Division

Title of Accomplishment or Milestone: Produce report on the 2002 U.S. purse seine fishery for tropical tunas in the western-central Pacific for the South Pacific Regional Tuna Treaty Consultation.

Current Status: Completed.

Background Information: The Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the South Pacific Tuna Treaty (SPTT) manager, annually convenes a meeting of parties to the Treaty. Meetings have been conducted since the start of the SPTT in 1988. Attendees usually include representatives of the 16 Island nations, the FFA staff, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) representative (the SPC is the scientific consultant of the FFA), and the U.S. (usually consists of a NMFS science representative, a State Department representative and members of the tuna fishing constituency). Discussions focus on operational aspects of the SPTT such as the number of licenses, closed areas or reporting, observer placements, statistics collection, etc. The NMFS provides a summary of the past year's fishing and an assessment of the stock status to date.

Purpose of Activity: To summarize 2002 western-central Pacific U.S. purse seine fisheries statistics.

Description of Accomplishment and Significant Results: NMFS produced and will present a paper entitled, "The 2002 U.S. purse seine fishery for tropical tunas in the western-central Pacific." Twenty-nine U.S. purse seiners fished in the western-central Pacific in 2002, a continued decreasing trend from the 32 in 2001. Logbooks were processed from 84% of the fleet in 2002, and length measurements were collected from 28,000 fish, mainly from the first 9 months of 2002. The 2002, U.S. tropical tuna catch (yellowfin, skipjack and bigeye tunas) increased 3% from the record low established in 2001 (115,500 mt) to 118,800 mt. The fleet was not effected by oversupplied markets in 2002 and operated continuously throughout the year. El Niño conditions prevailed in the area and were most intense during the last half of the year. The El Niño caused the fleet to fish further east than usual and more on schools of free-swimming tunas (58%) than on schools associated with floating objects (39%). Since fishing on free-swimming schools is not as efficient as fishing on schools associated with floating objects, many of the vessel performance factors declined. Catch rates decreased slightly from 23 t/day fished in 2001 to 22 t/day fished in 2002, and average sets per trip increased 9% from those reported in 2001.

Significance of Accomplishment: The paper and participation by NMFS continues monitoring of a valuable U.S. fishery and its associated stocks, supports the constituency and maintains the mission of NMFS in building sustainable fisheries.

Problems: A low proportion of the data had been received in time to produce the report due to a large number of transshipments in 2002.

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